

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE IN DECLINE

FACTSHEET

The Impacts of Livestock on the Greater Sage-Grouse



The Greater Sage-Grouse, still legally hunted in many states, have reached record low numbers. Its habitat is slowly being chipped away by oil and gas development, destructive livestock grazing, fire, timber sales, and drought. A 2021 U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) study found an 80% range-wide decline in population since 1965 and a nearly 40% decline since 2002. Government scientists predict that 78% of leks (communal breeding grounds) have a more than 50% chance of disappearing over the next six decades.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for 245 million acres of public lands in 13 western states. The agency oversees more Greater Sage-Grouse habitat than any other land management agency. Nevertheless, estimates suggest that core sage grouse habitat is disappearing at a rate of about 1.3 million acres a year from a national base of 26 million acres.

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BLM is Failing to Manage the Land Health of Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat

BLM records show that the Wyoming Basin Ecoregion has a livestock grazing failure level exceeding 40% of the assessed area. Consider the data on the sage grouse breeding bird densities. The red and orange points are home to 50% of the breeding bird population range wide.

In this map, the black areas represent the livestock allotments that the agency has identified as “failing to meet rangeland health standards.” It overlaps the data layer of allotments that BLM has identified as failing with the bird breeding areas so that you can see the impact of grazing.

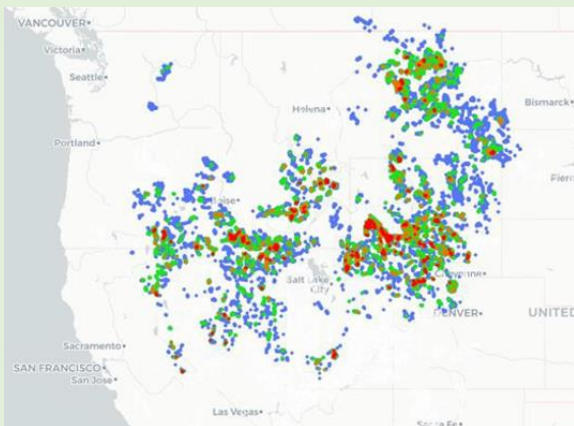


Figure 1. Greater Sage-Grouse Breeding Bird Densities (25% red, 50% - orange, 75% - green, 100% - blue). Chick survival rate is declining in Wyoming at an alarming rate (HCN, Wyoming Sage-Grouse numbers 'alarming', Angus M. Thuermer Jr. Jan. 11, 2022), and is expected to hit a low in 2022, heading back to 1990's levels

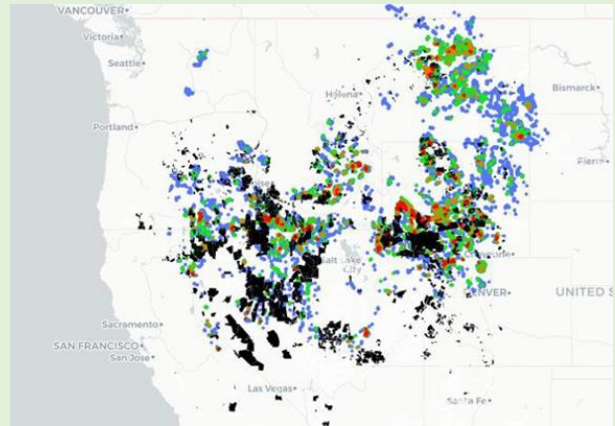
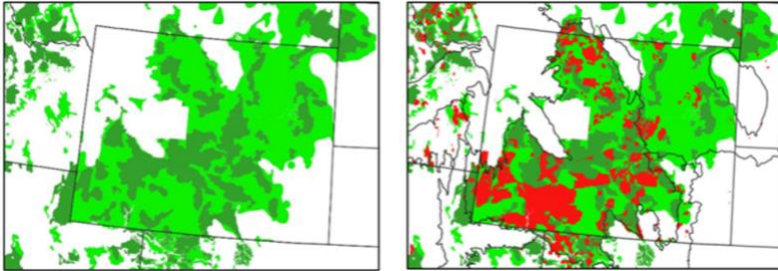


Figure 2. Greater Sage-Grouse Breeding Bird Density showing allotments failing due to livestock circa 2020.

Wyoming Habitat is Pivotal to Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery

The state of Wyoming is home to a third of the remaining Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. Of the approximately 17,222,271 acres that BLM manages in Wyoming, the agency has determined that 8,059,583 acres are failing to meet the agency land health standards. In 44% of allotments in the state that the agency has assessed, BLM has identified livestock as the cause for failing land health.



The dark green areas represent the Priority Habitat Management Areas for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Wyoming. The light green represents the General Habitat Management Areas. Areas that BLM has identified as failing land health standards due to livestock are overlaid in red.

Since private lands are not included in the BLM assessment and because we have not identified public lands that are failing land health standards for other reasons like drought or fire, the red area is certainly underrepresenting the extent of the marginal lands.

Oil & Gas Development Prioritized Over Sage Grouse



Even as sage grouse numbers plummet throughout the West, BLM continues to waive habitat protections so that oil and gas operations can work without hindrance. According to BLM records in just three field offices, approximately 80 such waivers were issued in the last four years. The waivers allow mainly oil and gas activity in areas set aside to protect sage grouse and various migratory raptors. The agency has not been transparent. Seven of the BLM Wyoming field offices have yet to provide any documents.

What's Next?

The Greater Sage-Grouse population now is less than a quarter of what it was more than 50 years ago. Continuing sage grouse declines will likely result in imposition of Endangered Species Act protections that will be far stricter than current safeguards.



Resources

www.peer.org/mapping-the-range

2022 USGS, *Range-wide Greater Sage-Grouse Hierarchical Monitoring Framework*: <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2020/1154/ofr20201154.pdf> See the statewide analysis for Wyoming at 177-191.

2013 USGS, *Summary of Science, Activities, Programs, and Policies the Influence the Rangeland Conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse*. <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2013/1098/OF13-1098.pdf> See the analysis of the impacts of Grazing at 92-100.